
CLAIM OF PĀÑCARĀTRA ON BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

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By

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The *Bhagavadgītā* (Gītā), the Mokṣadharmaparvan of the *Mahābhārata* and two *Samhitās* : *Īśvara* and *Pārameśvara* of the Pāñcarātra Āgama are an important source of the history of the Pāñcarātra doctrine. One can obtain an outline, if not a clear picture, of the early phases of the Pāñcarātra thought from these sources. It is a fact that the *Gītā* contains not a single reference either to the name Pāñcarātra or to the *Vyūha* theory therein. All the same there are the following points which reveal allegiance to the Pāñcarātra tradition with the *Bhagavadgītā*.

- 1) *Yoga* tradition told in *Gītā* 4. 1-7
- 2) Kashmiri reading *Sātvata dharmagoptā* in *Gītā* 11. 18
- 3) Reference to Vāsudeva in *Gītā* 8. 19 and 10.37
- 4) Interpretation of *Catvāraḥ* in *Gītā* 10.6

(1) *Yoga tradition* : The fourth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* is styled *Jñānakarma-Samnyāsayoga*. The tradition of the 'Yoga' narrated in the opening verses therein (4. 1-7) regards Bhagavān as the promulgator of this doctrine (*Yoga*). He taught it to Vivasvān. The latter passed it on to Manu who later on imparted it to Ikṣvāku ; and through him it was revealed to kings and sages. This *Yoga* was somehow lost in the course of time. Lord Kṛṣṇa restored it to Arjuna who proved to be worthy of his grace and confidence. Here Arjuna raised a doubt (4.4) as to how he (Lord Kṛṣṇa) could be the teacher of Vivasvān, an ancient personality. This query served as a device for the Lord to explain the doctrine of Avatāra and also the antiquity of the 'Yoga' (4. 6-7).

The above account bears a close resemblance with the account of the origin and relay of the *Ekāntidharma* narrated in the Mokṣadharmaparvan of the *Mahābhārata* (XII. 335. 1. 51). This doctrine was promulgated by Lord Nārāyaṇa during the very first stage of cosmic evolution in which mental birth of Brahmā took place. This Dharma like the *Yoga* of the *Gītā* was often lost and restored during the subsequent ages marked by *Cākṣuṣa*, *Vācika*, *Śravaṇaja*, *Nāsikya*, *Aṇḍaja* and finally *Padmaja* births of Brahmā. During the *Padmaja* life-time of Brahmā, Lord Nārāyaṇa imparted the *Ekāntidharma* to

Brahmā who relayed it to generations represented by Dakṣa, Āditya, Vivasvān, Manu and Ikṣvāku who caused its diffusion with the help of sages. This doctrine was finally preserved for the posterity by the Sātvatas.

Elucidating the salient features of the *Ekāntidharma*, the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* states (XII. 336. 58A) that the followers of this religion practise non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*), they are devoted to the welfare of all beings (*Sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ*) and have abandoned all action (*Sarvakarmavivarjitāḥ*) and thus they attain self-realisation. These qualities, especially the attitude of abandonment of all action is in keeping with the teaching embodied in the fourth chapter of the *Gītā*. Therefore one may learn from the comparison of the passages mentioned above that the *Yoga* of the one and the *Dharma* of the other refer to one and the same doctrine of a long historical background ; and neither the *Gītā* nor the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* have the privilege of newly propounding it. The latter however is very elaborate in narrating the history and contains specific reference to the *Vyūha* theory, the role of the Sātvatas and the evolution and characteristics of the Pāñcarātra. It appears from that account that the *Ekāntidharma* which passed through the phases of absorbing the *Vyūha* theory of the Sātvatas and the influence of Veda, Sāṃkhya, Pāśupata and other doctrines, finally culminated into Pāñcarātra, a composite personality.

The *Īśvara* and *Pārameśvara Saṃhitās* (I. 29ff and I. 35ff), while closely following the *Mahābhārata* evidence, appear to have regard also to the *Gītā* evidence. That the legacy of that perennial doctrine has been claimed by the Pāñcarātra cult of the historical time, is evident from the resumé of the development of the doctrine (*Samāgama*) variously styled as ' *Yoga* ' named as action without desire of fruit, *nirāśīḥ karmasaṃjñitāḥ* i. e. marked by action without desire of fruit, or *Yogadharma*, or *Śāstra* or *Ekāntidharma*, as drawn in the *Īśvara* (I. 2a) and *Pārameśvara* (I. 35ff) *Saṃhitās* almost in an identical manner. There, one finds a linking, in one place, of *Yoga* and *Ekāntidharma*. Besides, the typical characteristic feature of that doctrine viz. renunciation in action is also in keeping with the spirit of the *Gītā*. The *Vyūha* doctrine is not only adopted in the Pāñcarātra from the source mentioned in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* but it has become a *sine qua non* for that religion. And further it is asserted that Sātvatas preserved this thought which is very hard to grasp and practise. Besides, these texts declare that the divine scriptures of the Pāñcarātra religion : Sātvata, Pauṣkara and Jayākhya are in fact redactions of the age old teaching.

(2) Now we may return to the *Gītā* to find out whether there are some more places showing its affinity to the Pāñcarātra in other respects also. Here the Kashmiri reading of the *Gītā* may come to our help. There the latter half of 11. 18 of the *Gītā* reads '*Sanātanaḥ Sātvataadharmagoptā*' instead of '*Sanātanaḥ Śāśvataadharmagoptā*.' If that reading is accepted, then Kṛṣṇa would be held as the Protector of the Sātvata religion. It is true that this reading is not universally accepted. Even then here is a place which the Pāñcarātra tradition can make use of for a claim for legacy.

(3) The *Gītā* refers to Vāsudeva in two places (i) *Vāsudevaḥ sarvaṃ* (7. 19) and *Vṛṣṇīnām Vāsudevo'smi* (10. 37) which tell us that the faith in Vāsudeva as the All-pervasive God, had already established itself in Epic India and it is reflected in the teaching of Lord Kṛṣṇa. It need not be specially mentioned that this faith has been the hard core of the Pāñcarātra doctrine of the Epic as well as of the historic times. The *Mokṣadharmaparvan* has already suggested that the *Vyūha* doctrine had passed through four stages of one (*ekavyūha*), two (*dvivvyūha*), three (*trivvyūha*) and four (*caturvyūha*) members. Pāñcarātra represents the final phase admitting of four members: Vāsudeva, Saṅkaraṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The *Gītā* may be taken to belong to the period of time when the *Vyūha* theory was confined to *Ekavyūha* i. e. Vāsudeva.

(4) But there is also a view that the *Caturvyūha* was known to the *Gītā*. This view is put forth by B. G. Tilak (vide *Gītārahasya*—English edn. Poona 1965, pp. 1067 ff and 754 ff). According to him, the word *Catvāraḥ* in the *Gītā* (10. 6) verse '*Catvāro Manavastathā*' does not mean 'four Manus' but 'four (Vyūhas) and Manus'. If this view is accepted then follows the presumption of existence of the *Vyūha* doctrine at the time of the *Gītā*. Anyway this is one more place for the Pāñcarātra tradition to lay claim on the *Gītā*.

To conclude, it may be observed that though it cannot be positively said that the distinguishing characteristics of the Pāñcarātra, Sātvataadharma and the *Vyūha* theory were known to the *Gītā*, yet the religion having faith in Vāsudeva as Supreme and the renunciation in action as a path for liberation can safely be said to have been inherited by the *Gītā*, the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* and the Pāñcarātra literature, through a common divine source trailing from Vivasvān and other authorities.

References :

1 *Bhagavadgītā* 4. 1-7

इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम् ।
 विवस्वान् मनवे प्राह मनुर्िक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत् ॥
 ...एवं परंपराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः ।
 स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परंतप ॥

2 *Mahābhārata* (XII. 336 to 51)

... नूनमेकान्ति धर्मोऽयं श्रेष्ठो नारायणप्रियः
 ... ततो हि सात्वतो धर्मो व्याप्य लोकानवस्थितः ।
 ... दुर्विज्ञेयो दुष्करश्च सात्वतैर्धार्यते सदा ।
 ... आदित्ये सवितुर्ज्येष्ठे विवस्वान् जगृहे ततः ।
 ... विवस्वान् मनवे ददौ । ... मनुश्च इक्ष्वाकवे ददौ ।
 ... पाञ्चरात्रस्य कृत्स्नस्य वक्ता नारायणः स्वयम् ।

3 *Īśvara Samhitā* (1. 29 ff.) and *Pārameśvara Samhitā*
 (1. 35 ff.) :

एषा कर्तयुगो धर्मः निराशीः कर्मसंज्ञितः
 योगाख्यो योगधर्माख्यः शास्त्राख्यश्च समागमः ।
 ... सप्तमे पद्मजे सर्गे प्राप्तो भगवतः तथा ।
 ... विवस्वतः ततः प्राप्तो मनुना इक्ष्वाकुणा ततः ।
 इक्ष्वाकुणा च कथितो प्राप्य लोकानवस्थितः ।
 ...दुर्विज्ञेयो दुष्करश्च सात्वतैर्धार्यते सदा ॥